

When a Child is born into our Orthodox Church Community,

By V. Rev. Dr. Joseph F. Purpura

When we are blessed with a new life, when parents participate in the very divine act of giving life, literally participating in God's creation, there are many blessings and prayers prescribed by the Church for mother and child.

1. On the first day of life, the prayers by the priest for the mother and child state, "We give thanks to thee, for thou has been well-pleased even now to bring to birth into the world a human being from thy servants (the name of the mother) and (the name of the father); we pray of thee, O lord our God, to bless this baby here present...." Please call the Church office so the priest may come either to the hospital or home to bless mother and child on their first day of new life.

2. On the eighth day the formal prayers of naming a child take place. As Adam in paradise named every animal in the world, parents are given the blessing of naming their child. The eighth day in the Church is known as the 1st day of the new Creation, typically referring to Sunday, the day of Resurrection – since Sunday in the Old Testament was known as the 1st day and Saturday as the seventh day – Sunday the day of Resurrection – Pascha itself is referred to as the eighth day – the new day of creation following Christ's Resurrection. It is on this eighth day that the Church formally names the Child who is nearing his day of Baptism and becoming part of and a member of the Kingdom of God, through Jesus Christ. The prayers of naming state, "O Lord our God, we pray thee and beseech thee, let the light of thy countenance be signed upon thy servant, (name given to the child), and let thy cross of thin only-begotten Son be signed in his (her) heart and thoughts... And grant, O Lord, that thy holy Name may remain not denied on him (her), as he (she) is united in due time to thy holy Church and perfected through the fearful mysteries of thy Christ...".

3. The 40th day Churching, just as our Lord was brought to the temple on the 40th day, we likewise bring our children to offer them to God in His temple. We offer the child and present him to God's love, to His protection. A promise to baptize this child is made this day, "In due time he/she will receive Holy Illumination...." On the 40th day or the Sunday closest to the 40th day the mother and father bring their child to the Church where the priest reads the prayers for the mother and child and the child is formally presented to the Church community and to God in His temple and in the Sanctuary. This service of Churching states, "O Lord, God Almighty, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has fashioned all nature , both rational and irrational, through thy Word and has brought all things from non-being into being, we pray thee and beseech thee save this thy handmaiden (the name of the mother) by thy will... And bless this child born of her, increase, sanctify, grant understanding, bestow wisdom, and a good frame of mind..." (from the Churching service)

Please note that Churching Service is not normally done during the Divine Liturgy and in fact the notes for the service say that it is not to be done during the Divine Liturgy. In our parish we do the service of Churching just before the Divine Liturgy begins, so that the mother may be present for the entire Divine Liturgy and partake of communion on that day.

4. Baptism: Baptism takes place in our tradition anytime following the 40-day Churching. Baptism is initiation into the Orthodox Faith. We state in this service that the child when immersed into the Baptismal waters, dies to the old and fallen Adam and rises in Christ who is the new Adam, the new man. It is on this day that we say this child becomes an heir of the Kingdom of God, a son or daughter of the Light – a son or daughter of God, through Baptism and through Jesus Christ, “AS many as have been Baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.” (from the service of Baptism)

5. Chrismation (confirmation): In the Orthodox Church Chrismation, the sealing of reception of the Holy Spirit immediately follows the Baptism and immersion into the Baptismal font. The priest anoints the child with Holy Myron and says each time, “Seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit,” as the child receives Holy Chrismation and the gift of the Holy Spirit Himself.

6. First Communion: is granted to the child immediately following Baptism and Chrismation all in the same service. The child of God receives, “The Body and Blood of Christ.” The newly Baptized and Chrismated child, who now received Christ Himself in Holy Communion, is now as fully a member of the Church as you and me.

The tradition of the Church is that the godparents, in addition to their day of baptism, also bring the newly Baptized child to communion on the following Sunday from Baptism as well for communion and thereafter their parents bring them. The tradition is that the newly Baptized child is the first in line for Communion on the Sunday following Baptism.

We encourage all our parents to avail themselves of the prayers and blessings of the priests of the Orthodox Church for their children. We encourage parents to bring their children regularly to Church from infancy, so that their children will grow strong and well as sons and daughters of the Living God, so that they may come to know God’s great love and mercy and so that each child born into our community may know God and have Life, Joy, and Peace, which comes from Christ alone.

Please feel free to contact Fr Joseph Purpura with any questions you may have.
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